

CASE STUDY

THE POLITICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CAUSES OF SYRIA'S REFUGEE CRISIS

In recent years, the Middle East has become the world's largest source region for refugees. Like central Africa, there is an unhappy fit between state borders and the Middle East's ethnic, cultural and religious map. The Sykes-Picot line was drawn by the British and French in 1916. It split apart large Sunni and Shia Muslim communities and led to the creation of several inherently unstable states including Iraq and Syria. The BBC calls it 'the map that spawned a century of resentment'.

The current crisis in Syria began when rebel groups demanded the resignation of Syria's ruling President Bashar al-Assad in 2011. The EU and USA initially supported some rebels but by 2015 found themselves bombing Daesh in Syria, effectively acting alongside Assad's forces. Russia and Saudi Arabia have provided funding for rival armies of groups, fuelling the conflict further. Figure 1.25 shows the enormous numbers of refugees fleeing Syria since the

crisis began. You can see how the majority have travelled to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan rather than EU states.

Environmental factors

US security analysts based at the Pentagon have in part attributed Syria's refugee crisis to desertification. From 2006 to 2011, large areas of Syria suffered an extreme drought that, according to scientists, was exacerbated by climate change (see page 22). The drought led to increased poverty and relocation to urban areas. In turn, rising unemployment in cities triggered unrest and conflict.

PPPPSS CONCEPTS

Explain two strengths of the way data showing interactions between places have been represented graphically in Figure 1.25.

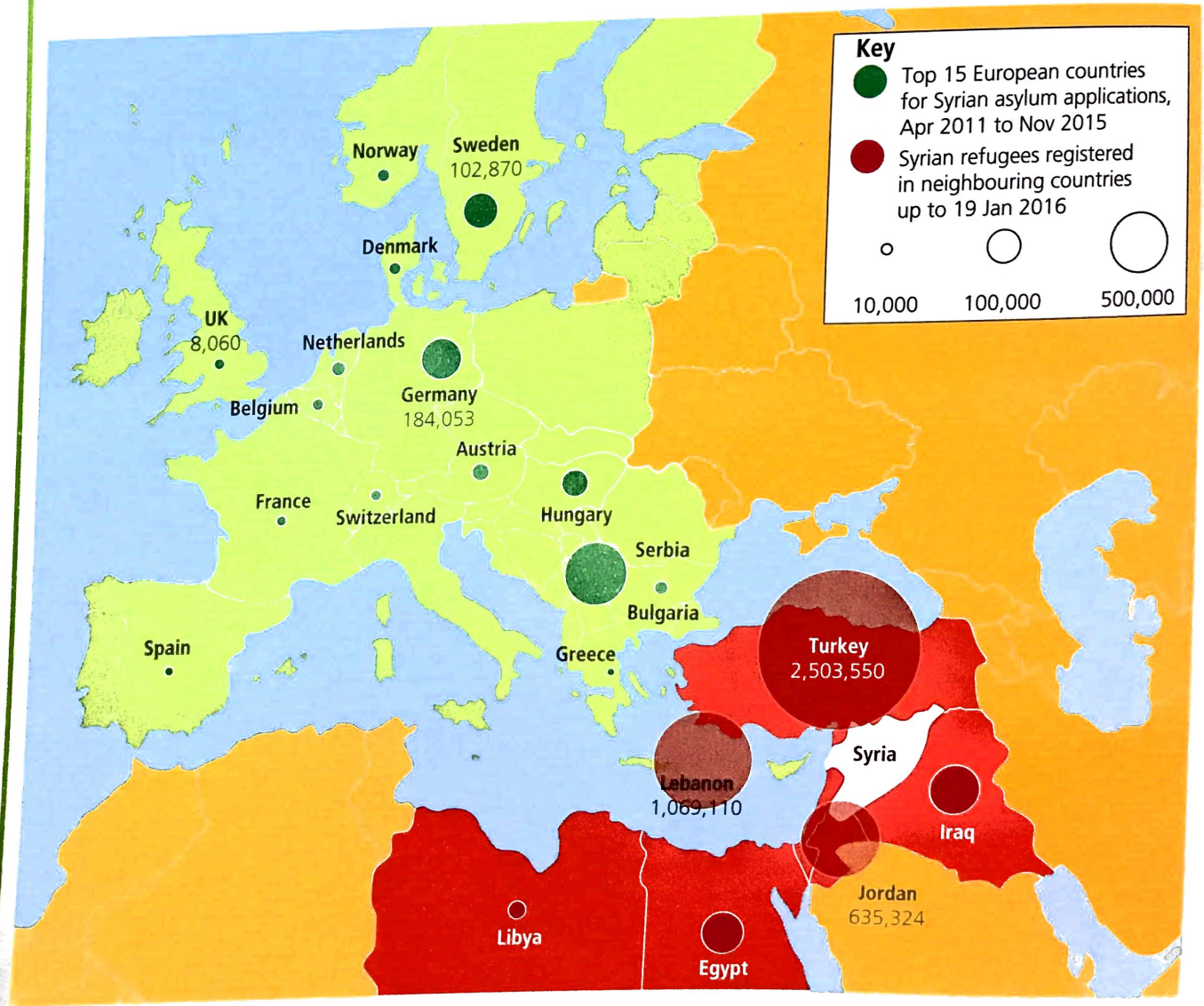


Figure 1.25 The distribution pattern of Syrian refugees, 2015